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SUBJECT: COLOMBIAN TERRORISM - DEFENSE OFFICIALS PAINT
BLEAK PICTURE

¶1. CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR CURTIS W. KAMMAN. REASON
1.5(B).

¶2. (C) SUMMARY: COORDINATOR FOR COUNTERTERRORISM MIKE SHEEHAN AND ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE (SOLIC) BRIAN SHERIDAN MET WITH COLOMBIAN MINISTER OF DEFENSE LUIS RAMIREZ, THE COMMANDER OF MILITARY FORCES FERNANDO TAPIAS, AND THE CHIEFS OF THE VARIOUS ARMED SERVICE BRANCHES. SHEEHAN AND SHERIDAN ASKED THE MILITARY LEADERS HOW THE USG COULD BEST SEND THE MESSAGE THAT THE USG WILL NOT TOLERATE FARC AND OTHER VIOLENCE WITHOUT SHOWING THAT THE USG IS FEARFUL OF FARC RETALIATION. THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY LEADERS USED THE FORUM TO DESCRIBE THE MULTITUDE OF PROBLEMS THEY FACE IN TRYING TO ELIMINATE COLOMBIAN TERRORIST GROUPS, OFTEN VENTING THEIR FRUSTRATION. THOSE AT THE TABLE CITED DISTURBING NEW TRENDS IN THE KIDNAPPING INDUSTRY AS THE FINANCIAL ENGINE OF THE TERRORIST GROUPS AND TROUBLING EVIDENCE THAT EVEN THE PARAMILITARY GROUPS WHOSE STATED MISSION IS TO FIGHT LEFTIST TERRORISTS ARE RESORTING TO THE SAME TERROR TACTICS USED BY THEIR ENEMIES. TAPIAS NOTED THAT THE PARAMILITARIES' STRENGTH EXCEEDED THAT OF THE ELN, AND WOULD EVENTUALLY ECLIPSE THE FARC AS WELL. SHEEHAN NOTED THAT THE USG WAS INVESTIGATING WHETHER PARAMILITARIES COULD BE DESIGNATED AS A FOREIGN TERRORIST ORGANIZATION. END SUMMARY

LEGISLATION NOT STRONG ENOUGH; "JAILS ARE A JOKE"

¶3. (C) SHEEHAN AND SHERIDAN LISTENED TO A LITANY OF COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE COLOMBIAN JUDICIAL SYSTEM, INCLUDING MINISTER RAMIREZ'S ARGUMENT FOR TOUGHER LEGISLATION AND PENAL CODES THAT WOULD ALLOW THE GOVERNMENT TO TAKE A STRONGER STAND AGAINST TERRORISTS AND GUERRILLAS. SENTENCES ARE LIGHT AND TOO OFTEN COMMUTED. TAPIAS CONFIRMED THIS POINT, STRESSING THAT THE JAIL SYSTEM WAS "A JOKE" WHICH DID NOT DETER CRIMINALS. HE NOTED THAT THE INDIVIDUAL DETAINED AS A SUSPECT ON THE CALI CHURCH KIDNAPPING HAS ALREADY FLED PRISON.

CRIME-TERRORISM LINK

¶4. (C) RAMIREZ AND TAPIAS ALSO NOTED THE INCREASINGLY POWERFUL ARMS AVAILABLE TO THE TERRORISTS ON THE BLACK MARKET, WHILE OTHERS NOTED THE OUTSOURCING OF CRIMINAL ACTIVITY BY THE FARC AND THE ELN. THEY ALSO NOTED THAT THE FARC IS BEGINNING TO ENCROACH ON URBAN AREAS. SHEEHAN STRESSED THAT THE COLOMBIANS HAD TO TAKE A VERY STRONG STAND AND MAKE CLEAR THAT THEY WILL DEAL WITH TERRORISM AND VIOLENCE AS A CRIME, NOT A POLITICAL ISSUE. ALL INVOLVED WITH TERRORISM - REGARDLESS OF WHETHER INVOLVED IN FUNDRAISING, HARBORING TERRORISTS, OR CARRYING OUT TERRORIST ACTS - HAD TO BE PUNISHED. GEN JORGE MORA, COMMANDER OF THE COLOMBIAN ARMY, NOTED THAT THEY FELT CAUGHT BETWEEN THEIR DESIRE TO WORK FOR TOUGHER LAWS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AND EUROPEAN AND OTHER PRESSURE NOT TO DO ANYTHING THAT WOULD MAKE THE GOC APPEAR TO BE VIOLATING INTERNATIONALLY ACCEPTED HUMAN RIGHTS. HE ALSO STRESSED THAT THE TERRORIST AND REBEL GROUPS MUST RECEIVE THE MESSAGE FROM THE UNITED STATES THAT THEIR ACTIONS WILL BE SEEN AS TERRORISM.

¶5. (C) SHEEHAN CONFIRMED THE UNITED STATES' CONCERN ABOUT TERRORISM IN COLOMBIA, NOTING THAT HE WOULD URGE OTHER PARTS OF THE GOVERNMENT TO PUBLICLY EXPRESS THEIR OPPOSITION TO TERRORIST GROUPS. ALTHOUGH "PLAN COLOMBIA"

WAS NOT THE MAIN TOPIC OF CONVERSATION, IT AND THE USG'S PENDING FINANCIAL RESPONSE WAS IMPLICIT IN THE EXCHANGE. THE COLOMBIANS OPENLY STATED THE NEED FOR INCREASED RESOURCES AND TRAINING.

16. (C) COMMENT: THE GOC OFFICIALS AT THE MEETING SEEMED TO GO OUT OF THEIR WAY NOT TO BLAME PRESIDENT PASTRANA OR EVEN TO MENTION HIS NAME. THIS OMISSION IS AT ODDS WITH LOCAL MEDIA AND EVEN STREET GRAFFITI IN WHICH PASTRANA'S "PEACE AT ANY COST" STANCE IS EQUATED WITH WEAKNESS AND AN UNWILLINGNESS TO CONFRONT THE THREAT REPRESENTED BY THE FARC, THE ELN, THE PARAMILITARIES, AND OTHER TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS. DESPITE STATING THEIR LACK OF RESOURCES, THE MILITARY LEADERS GAVE NO INDICATION THAT THEY WERE LOBBYING FOR AN INCREASE IN MILITARY SPENDING, CURRENTLY ABOUT THREE AND A HALF PERCENT OF GDP. END COMMENT.

KAMMAN

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